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Parent Diaries and the Child Study Movement in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia

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Parent diaries of child development and early upbringing—sometimes referred to as “mothers’ diaries”—are an important source in the historiography of Russian childhood, especially in relation to the “modernization” of Russian child care and motherhood at the turn of twentieth century.¹ The specific context in which these diaries, as a genre, proliferated in Russia at this juncture has, however, received little analytical attention. In what follows, I situate the production of parent diaries, as practice and discourse, in the history of the Russian child study movement between the 1880s and the 1930s.

Child study was a heterogeneous field of scientific and professional endeavor. It formed in Russia in the course of the 1880s–early 1900s through the mobilization and collaboration of a range of actors belonging to the empire’s growing professional intelligentsia. These actors were stratified across distinct, mutually competing, disciplinary, professional, and administrative structures and environments, namely those of education, medicine, and psychology.² Parents belonging to this same social group—tsarist Russia’s educated minority—were perceived as a vital stakeholder (especially early on in the movement’s development), with infant care and preschool upbringing (*vospitanie*), in the home environment and the family context, designated as *the* territory of parental jurisdiction.³

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¹Catriona Kelly, *Children’s World: Growing up in Russia, 1890–1991* (New Haven, 2007), 38–40, 304–5, 351, 356–57, 375. The contemporary historiography of Russian childhood, with its focus on the historical reconstruction of childhood subjectivities, places rather more emphasis, in methodological terms, on diaries kept by the children themselves. See Alla A. Sal’nikova, *Rossiiskoe detstvo v XX veke: Istorii, teoriia i praktika issledovaniia* (Kazan’, 2007).

²On Russian child study in the tsarist era see, for example, A. A. Nikol’skaia, *Vozrastnaia i pedagogicheskaia psikhologiia v dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii* (Dubna, 1995).

³I. A. Sikorskii, “Obiazannosti roditeliei pered potomstvom,” *Vestnik vospitaniia*, 1890, no. 2:3–21.

Parents were, however, mobilized into child study in ambivalent ways, not least because “the parent” was usually a woman, whose position in the field of science (*nauka*) was at this time—on account of women’s restricted access to higher education—considered inferior and marginal, if not illegitimate by default.⁴ “The (educated) parent” as a participant in child study was, therefore, consistently kept on the boundaries of expert knowledge. Even on their own “turf”—that of early child care and *vospitanie*—parents were patronized by a small but growing body of experts and professionals in infant hygiene, preschool pedagogy, and child psychology. Yet a number of these new experts also sought to enroll parents in child study as collaborators in a scientific enterprise, casting them as particularly well-positioned potential observers of the earliest phases of child development.

It was in this context that the parent’s diary of the first years of a child’s life was situated strategically on the boundary between, on the one hand, “parenthood” (a culturally specific type of educated parenthood associated with the wider self-identity of the late tsarist Russia’s professional middle classes) and, on the other, “science” (the emergent field of expert knowledge in child development, care, and socialization). This turned the parent diary into a “boundary object” *par excellence*—an object with an ambiguous orientation between experts and parents alike; an object instrumental (in both the literal and the metaphorical sense of the word) to their mutual interaction and cooperation; an object crucial to the articulation—precisely through this interaction—of the (inherently differential) expertise on the boundaries of “science” in child study.⁵

Parent diaries of child development were one of the key genres of the child study movement internationally as well.⁶ Indeed, the beginnings of child study are often associated with the publication of William Thierry Preyer’s *The Soul of a Child* (1881), an account of infant development based on the author’s systematic diary observations of his son, from birth to the age of three.⁷ Preyer’s work came in the wake of an influential 1876–77 exchange between Hippolyte Taine and Charles Darwin on the relationship between child development, language acquisition, and human evolution, published in articles based on diary observations of their daughter and son, respectively, as well as Bernard Perez’s more detailed exposition, *The First Three Years of Childhood* (1878).⁸ Preyer would have been aware of earlier

⁴On female higher education in tsarist Russia see Christine Johanson, *Women’s Struggle for Higher Education in Russia, 1855–1900* (Montreal, 1987).

⁵Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer, “Institutional Ecology, ‘Translations’ and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley’s Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907–39,” *Social Studies of Science* 19:3 (1989): 387–420; Susan Leigh Star, “This is Not a Boundary Object: Reflections on the Origin of a Concept,” *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 35:5 (2010): 601–17.

⁶D. B. Wallace, M. B. Franklin, and R. T. Keegan, “The Observing Eye: A Century of Baby Diaries,” *Human Development* 37 (1994): 1–29; Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840–1900* (Oxford, 2010), 222–32.

⁷William Thierry Preyer, *Die Seele des Kindes* (Leipzig, 1881). See also James Sully’s review of the 1882 edition in *Mind* 7:27 (1882): 416–23. Preyer was born near Manchester, but studied and worked in Germany, assuming professorship in physiology at the University of Jena in the late 1860s and acquiring renown in the 1880s as one of the pioneers of developmental psychology. See his obituary in *British Medical Journal* 2:1910 (1897): 375–76.

⁸Hippolyte Taine, “De l’acquisition du langage chez les enfants et les peuples primitifs,” *Revue philosophique* 1 (1876): 5–23; Charles Darwin, “Biographical Sketch of an Infant,” *Mind* 2:7 (1877): 285–94; Bernard Perez, *Les trois premières années de l’enfant* (Paris, 1878). On the context and influence of Darwin’s article see Marjorie Lorch and Paula Hellal, “Darwin’s ‘Natural Science of Babies,’” *Journal of the History of the*

German publications, based on Enlightenment philosophy and pedagogy, especially Dietrich Tiedemann's *Observations on the Development of Psychological Faculties in Children* (1787), and perhaps also physician Berthold Sigismund's *The Child and the World* (1856).⁹

The influence of Preyer's work lay in the establishment of the diary as a *method* in the study of early childhood—a practice he suggested could and should be emulated by others in systematic fashion, especially parents. Thus, *The Soul of a Child* contributed greatly to the diary of child development being turned into a practice and a discourse that made serious scientific claims while simultaneously mobilizing around it a wider network of stakeholders, promoters, and emulators ready to engage in it in a variety of ways. What became so influential in the decades to follow, in Russia as elsewhere, was less Preyer's specific model of diary-keeping or his particular account of child development, and more the very possibility of deploying diaries of child development written by parents to foster child study networks, in which particular sets of relationships would be established between an emergent body of experts in infant development (early child psychology in particular), related professionals who claimed early child care and upbringing as their jurisdiction (mostly doctors and educators), and wider groups of engaged parents.

Russia was no exception to these influences and developments.¹⁰ In what follows, I trace the key sociocultural and professional contexts in which parent diaries were initially promoted in Russia between the Great Reforms and the First World War. Next, I discuss in greater detail two diaries published in the mid-1910s as examples of very different kinds of positioning of Russian parents on the boundaries of expertise in early child development, care, and education (*vospitanie*). I then analyze the way in which some Russian psychologists enrolled parental diary-keeping as an “objective” methodology in psychology in the late 1910s–early 1920s. In this context I examine, as a counterexample, the idiosyncratic framing of V. A. Rybnikova-Shilova's diary, in which, unusually, maternal subjectivity was explicitly built into the scientific legitimacy of a child development diary. In conclusion, I sketch out the fate of parent diaries, especially as a method and genre of psychology, up until and beyond the 1936 liquidation of Soviet pedagogy under Stalin.

THE GENEALOGY OF A GENRE: PARENT DIARIES IN POST-REFORM RUSSIA

In the epilogue to *War and Peace*, Tolstoy's portrayal of an ideal of motherhood in Countess Mariia Rostova includes her closely observing the development of her baby son Andrei, jotting down “everything in the children's lives that seemed noteworthy to their mother as

Neurosciences 19 (2010): 140–57. For more on Perez see Dominique Ottavi, *De Darwin à Piaget: Pour une histoire de la psychologie de l'enfant* (Paris, 2001), 143–51.

⁹See Dietrich Tiedemann, *Beobachtungen über die Entwicklung der Seelenfähigkeiten bei Kindern* (Altenburg, 1897). This work, which originally appeared in 1787, was brought to wider public attention after its 1863 French translation. For more on Tiedemann see Donald J. Dietrich, “Dietrich Tiedemann: Child Psychologist in the 18th Century,” *Historian* 38:3 (1976): 455–73; and Michael E. Lamb and Heidi Keller, eds., *Infant Development: Perspectives from German Speaking Countries* (Hillsdale, NJ, 1991), 1–13. See also Berthold Sigismund, *Kind und Welt: Vätern, Müttern und Kinderfreunden* (Braunschweig, 1856).

¹⁰On Preyer's influence in late Imperial Russia see A. A. Nikol'skaia, “Znachenie rabot V. Preiera dlia razvitiia detskoi psikhologii,” *Voprosy psikhologii*, 1983, no. 3:143–48.

showing their characters, or suggesting general reflections on educational methods. They were for the most part quite insignificant trifles, but did not seem so to the mother, or to the father.”¹¹ Tolstoy modeled this on the diary kept in the late 1820s by his own mother, Countess Mariia, during the infancy of Tolstoy’s elder brother Nikolai, as well as the notes that his own wife, Sof’ia Andreevna, kept on their children as part of her personal diaries.¹²

According to N. A. Rybnikov’s brief overview of the history of Russian parent diaries, written in 1946, Tolstoy’s portrayal of Countess Mariia “strongly stimulated the Russian educated (*intelligentnuiu*) mother to note down [similar kinds of] observations in diary form.”¹³ Rybnikov does not provide any supporting evidence for this claim, but influential *belles-lettres*, such as Tolstoy’s novels, in addition to fixing in literary discourse a practice that was already current in some quarters of the Russian elite, could, indeed, have contributed to maternal diary-keeping becoming a significant marker of social distinction—namely that of *intelligentnost’*—for women belonging to late tsarist Russia’s educated classes, in the context of the transformations that this stratum was experiencing in the decades following Alexander II’s Great Reforms.¹⁴

Another factor that influenced the development of this practice between the 1860s and the 1880s was the growing involvement of women in Russia’s expanding pedagogical movement and the professionalization of early child care and upbringing.¹⁵ Throughout the nineteenth century early child care and the socialization of children of preschool age was considered the jurisdiction of the family, although Russian parents from the upper strata relied extensively on support from servant nannies, and increasingly on professional advice and intervention.¹⁶ The latter was provided especially by physicians, whose remit was physical development and hygiene, with which early child care was associated first and foremost.¹⁷ From the 1860s onward, there was also a significant proliferation of groups

¹¹See Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude (Oxford, 2010), 1261–62 (Epilogue, pt. I, chap. 15). All other translations from Russian in this article are my own.

¹²See N. A. Rybnikov, “Detskie dnevniki, kak material po detskoj psikhologii: Kratkii istoricheskii ocherk,” *Nauchnyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Akademii Obrazovaniia* (NA RAO), f. 47, op. 1, d. 27, l. 11ob. This is a typescript manuscript of an article dated 1946. Rybnikov cites Tolstoy’s mother’s diary, known as “Zhurnal povedeniia Nikol’ien’ki,” as chronologically the first Russian mother’s diary to be eventually published. An excerpt from the latter came out in the volume *Mat’ i ded L. N. Tolstogo* (Moscow, 1928), a commemorative publication prepared for the centenary celebrations of Tolstoy’s birth, edited by his son, Sergei L’vovich.

¹³Rybnikov, “Detskie dnevniki,” l. 11ob.

¹⁴See, for example, Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL, 1997), 86–99.

¹⁵Barbara Alpern Engel, “Mothers and Daughters: Family Patterns and the Female Intelligentsia,” in *The Family in Imperial Russia: New Lines of Historical Research*, ed. David Ransell (Urbana, IL, 1976), 58–59, argues that the number of articles devoted to motherhood and child care increased hugely during the 1860s–1870s and that progressive women read and responded to them eagerly. She cites “Ukazatel’ literaturnykh zhenskogo voprosa na russkom iazyke,” *Severnyi vestnik* (July–August 1887), entries 1641–1755. On female pedagogical professionalization more generally see Christine Ruane, *Gender, Class, and the Professionalization of Russian City Teachers, 1860–1914* (Pittsburgh, 1994); and Andy Byford, “Psychology at High School in Late Imperial Russia (1881–1917),” *History of Education Quarterly* 48:2 (2008): 268–77. On the Russian kindergarten movement at this time see Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917–1932* (New York, 2001), 8–32.

¹⁶Steve A. Grant, *The Russian Nanny, Real and Imagined: History, Culture and Mythology* (Washington, 2012).

¹⁷Kelly, *Children’s World*, 296–305, 354–60.

who promoted the relevance of new forms of pedagogical expertise for these early periods of upbringing. Educated women became prominent in it, building on their roles as mothers and caregivers.

It is in this context that, for example, Adelaida Semenovna Simonovich, the founder of one of Russia's first kindergartens in 1866, kept diary records of the development of children, especially their speech, for a period of nineteen years, starting with her own children in 1861 and continuing with those attending her kindergarten, publishing articles based on this in the journal *Detskii sad*, which she co-edited with her husband.¹⁸ The 1870s also saw the publication of longer accounts of early child development and education written by and for women (as both mothers and educators) based in part on personal experiences of motherhood, but developed in the context of preschool pedagogy more generally.¹⁹

A greater involvement of male enthusiasts in this field relied, however, on its transformation into a space of science, especially through the importation of foreign works of physio-psycho-pedagogical and evolutionary-anthropological theorization of early child development, including the aforementioned book by Sigismund, and articles by Taine and Darwin.²⁰ Preyer's book was not translated into Russian until the 1890s, but its appearance in German in 1881–82 provided a significant impetus to those Russian men who sought to position themselves as local authorities in this nascent domain of expertise. The psychiatrist Ivan Alekseevich Sikorskii and pedagogue Petr Fedorovich Kapterev, in particular, penned their own summary accounts of infant development in the 1880s–1890s, and they were the ones to publish the first Russian translations of Preyer in the early 1890s.²¹

In this period parental observations and registrations of child development were extensively discussed and promoted in the meetings of the St. Petersburg Parent Circle, of which Kapterev was one of the founders.²² The Circle started off as a small assembly of

¹⁸On A. S. Simonovich see V. I. Iadeshko and F. A. Sokhina, eds., *Doshkol'naia pedagogika* (Moscow, 1978); and Zh. V. Chuikova, *Istoriko-pedagogicheskii analiz problem obucheniia doshkol'nikov rodnomu iazyku* (Elets, 2007), 72–76.

¹⁹E. N. Vodovozova, *Umstvennoe i nravstvennoe razvitie detei ot pervogo proiavleniia soznaniia do shkol'nogo vozrasta* (St. Petersburg, 1871); E. I. Konradi, *Ispoved' materi* (St. Petersburg, 1876). On the place of these publications in the history of Russian preschool pedagogy see P. F. Kapterev, *Istoriia russkoi pedagogii* (1915; reprint ed. St. Petersburg, 2004), 521–22.

²⁰Bertol'd Sigismund, *Ditia i mir. Posviashchaet otsam, materiam i družiam detei* (St. Petersburg, 1866). A translation of Taine's article came out in the journal *Znanie* in 1876, while Darwin's article was published in *Moskovskaia meditsinskaia gazeta* in 1878 and in *Pedagogicheskii sbornik* in 1881. These inspired Adelaida and Iakov Simonovich to publish their own related observations. See Ia. M. Simonovich, *Sravnenie individual'nogo razvitiia rebenka s epokhami chelovechestva* (1880; reprint ed. St. Petersburg, 1884); and A. S. Simonovich, *O detskom iazyke* (1880; reprint ed. St. Petersburg, 1884).

²¹See Sikorskii, *Vospitanie v vozraste pervogo detstva* (St. Petersburg, 1884). Sikorskii later developed this in issues of *Entsiklopediia semeinogo vospitaniia i obucheniia*, a series of the St. Petersburg Parent Circle edited by Kapterev. See also P. F. Kapterev, "Otlichitel'nye cherty psikhicheskogo razvitiia ditiati vo vtoroi god zhizni," *Vospitanie i obuchenie*, 1893, no. 7:217–27. Sikorskii published the first part of Preyer's *The Soul of a Child* as *Dusha rebenka: Nabludeniia nad dukhovnym razvitiem cheloveka v pervye gody zhizni* (St. Petersburg, 1891). Kapterev translated a more popular abbreviated version, addressed explicitly to parents, as *Dukhovnoe razvitie v pervom detstve s ukazaniiami dlia roditelei o ego nabludeniia* (St. Petersburg, 1894).

²²See, for example, "Roditel'skii kruzhok (Zasedaniia v Pedagogicheskom muzee)," *Vospitanie i obuchenie*, 1893, no. 7:236–37; "Roditel'skii kruzhok. (Zasedaniia v Pedagogicheskom muzee)," *Vospitanie i obuchenie*, 1893, no. 9:306–11; N. Arep'ev, "'Roditel'skii kruzhok' v Peterburge," *Vestnik vospitaniia*, 1897, no. 1:181–97, no. 3:158–69, and no. 5:188–97; and A. O. Selivanov, "Roditel'skii kruzhok pri Pedagogicheskom muzee voenno-uchebnykh zavedenii v S.-Peterburge," *Pedagogicheskii listok*, 1901, no. 6:741–45.

professional educators and doctors, enthusiasts in problems of *vospitanie* (especially early child care and pedagogy), and interested mothers from the same social milieu. They initially met in their own homes, but from 1888 organized themselves more formally as a subsection of the Pedagogical Museum in Solianoi gorodok in St. Petersburg, set up by the Army Ministry's Department of Education. In the 1880s–1900s the Pedagogical Museum was a significant center of pedagogical innovation in Russia, devoted to promoting educational practices based on new scientific principles.²³

The early meetings of the St. Petersburg Parent Circle did not follow a particularly rigorous program and consisted mostly of mothers reporting on their children, based on notes written down in diaries of varying degrees of detail and systematicity. These readings would usually be followed by a general discussion, during which an expert, such as a doctor, would provide more technical commentary. Although the proceedings were kept relatively informal, with those cast as experts sometimes discussing their own children, the meetings were also framed as “courses for parents,” with professionals taking on a leadership role, often lecturing to those assembled.²⁴

Nonetheless, the active enrolment of parents in what was envisaged as an emergent science remained crucial. Kapterev, for instance, was keen to make parental observations and registrations of children's psychological development more methodical and “scientific.”²⁵ He took it upon himself to work out a structured questionnaire that would assist parents in charting the development of memory in their young children.²⁶ The Circle's meetings also featured reports on significant academic publications, such as Sikorskii's 1891 translation of Preyer's *Soul of a Child*, with the Odessa-based professor of psychology Nikolai Nikolaevich Lange's exposition of the book in the journal *Russkaia shkola* being especially recommended on account of Lange's explicit call to Russian parents to emulate Preyer, as well as to compile mini-dictionaries of their children's first linguistic constructions.²⁷

Yet another context in which parent diaries of early child development were being promoted in turn-of-the-century Russia was the growing body of hygiene advice literature, which focused on rationalizing and modernizing Russian child care, as well as engaging educated mothers in it.²⁸ This particular area was dominated by medical professionals. For example, another significant participant of the Circle was the physician Vladimir Nikolaevich

²³See, for example, *Kratkii obzor deiatel'nosti Pedagogicheskogo muzeia voenno-uchebnykh zavedenii za 1894–95 g. (Dvadtsat' piatyi obzor)* (St. Petersburg, 1895); N. Flerov, “O pedagogicheskom muzee,” *Pedagogicheskii vestnik Moskovskogo uchebnogo okruga*, 1913, nos. 4–5:88–111; and N. G. Tarasov, ed., *Pedagogicheskii muzei byvshii Pedagogicheskogo obshchestva v 1909 godu* (Moscow, 1910). This was also the institution where Russia's first laboratory in experimental pedagogical psychology was established by A. P. Nechaev in 1901.

²⁴E. Ia. Korsakova and N. S. Kartsev, “Roditel'skii kruzhok,” *Pedagogicheskii sbornik*, 1895, no. 12:131–37.

²⁵P. F. Kapterev, “O nabludeniiakh nad det'mi,” *Vospitanie i obuchenie*, 1892, no. 2:65–73, and no. 3: 97–104.

²⁶For Kapterev's program see “Khronika,” *Vestnik vospitaniia*, 1891, no. 2:189.

²⁷“Khronika,” *Vestnik vospitaniia*, 1892, no. 4:190–95. Lange's account can be found in *Russkaia shkola*, 1891, nos. 9–12.

²⁸On the efforts of the St. Petersburg Parent Circle in this domain see, for example, P. F. Kapterev, “Pedagogicheskie kursy dlia materei i nian',” *Vospitanie i obuchenie*, 1893, no. 1:2–18.

Zhuk, at that time the most widely read child care guru.²⁹ He, too, used the meetings of the Circle to develop and promote special tables and charts, eventually publishing them in the form of a diary-like album, the purpose of which was to make mothers' daily registrations of their babies' development more rigorous, that is, more disciplined in following the principles laid out in his own exhaustive child care manual.³⁰

Another example is the female doctor Avgusta Aleksandrovna Dernova-Iarmolenko, who was also editor of the journal *Semeinoe vospitanie*.³¹ Dernova-Iarmolenko's *Diary of a Mother* (1911) was similarly a prestructured diary-album, which served as an aid for the mother's systematic monitoring of her child's development. For example, the opening page contains a chart for inserting information relevant to the first week of a baby's life: on the left are the established norms for the child's weight, urine and bowels output, temperature, pulse, sleeping hours, and so on; on the right is space for the mother to insert her own data next to it; additional space for diary notes proper is provided on the page opposite. The book also contains illustrative photographs, the purpose of which appears to be to inspire educated mothers to get into this role: they range from the evocative (for example, the first photograph depicts a mother, a newborn, and a midwife in a bourgeois setting) to the instructive (for example, a photo of a mother measuring the size of a baby's chest).³²

Dernova-Iarmolenko was keen for hygiene advice not to be absorbed dogmatically, and hoped that her diary would encourage mothers to make their own observations of their children's development. Her aim was "to train [the mother] to keep notes and then use these to refer to and formulate conclusions ... to seriously interest parents in the task of *vospitanie*, to make them ... read, observe, contemplate and apply this to the task at hand." Dernova-Iarmolenko also believed that those mothers who "[found] in themselves the strength, the time and the desire to keep a diary on their child" could, in fact, make a contribution to the science of child development. She provided her own address, inviting mothers to send her their completed diaries, although she did not specify how exactly she intended to use them.³³

All these efforts to enroll educated parents into a growing child study movement did not, however, lead to the publication of any comprehensive Russian parent diaries of child development until the mid-1910s.³⁴ Parents hesitated to get involved in a serious way, apparently due to diffidence about their levels of knowledge of psychology and physiology

²⁹V. N. Zhuk, *Mat' i ditia: Gigiena v obshchedostupnom izlozhenii* (St. Petersburg, 1881). This work was revised and expanded several times. See also Kelly, *Growing up in Russia*, 301–4.

³⁰"Khronika," *Vestnik vospitaniia*, 1891, no. 2:190–91; V. N. Zhuk, *Ditia: Dnevnik materi. Al'bom dlia zapisi nabliudenii materi nad fizicheskim razvitiem rebenka: Pervye tri goda* (St. Petersburg, 1892). According to Kelly, the album did not enjoy the popularity of the manual itself, suggesting that parents were not as interested in taking up this practice as Zhuk had hoped (*Growing up in Russia*, 304).

³¹After the Revolution Dernova-Iarmolenko worked at the Ekaterinoslav Higher Institute for Public Education training staff working in institutions for young children. See A. A. Dernova-Iarmolenko, *Pedologicheskie osnovy vospitaniia* (Orel, 1924).

³²Dernova-Iarmolenko, *Dnevnik materi: Knizhka dlia sistematicheskikh nabliudenii i zapisei nad telesnym i dushevnyim razvitiem rebenka* (Moscow, 1911), 12–13, 17.

³³*Ibid.*, 5, 6.

³⁴Isolated excerpts of diaries did appear, however, in pedagogical journals in the 1900–1910s, for example, E. B. "Iz dnevnika materi," *Semeinoe vospitanie*, 1914, no. 1:29–42, and no. 2:17–34, published and introduced by Dernova-Iarmolenko.

(something unsurprising given the way in which they tended to be lectured to by the experts). A number of prominent psychologists, such as Grigorii Chelpanov in Russia (founder of the Moscow Institute of Psychology) and Alfred Binet in France (inventor of the most widely used intelligence test at the time), questioned the legitimacy and value of diaries of development as a scientific method in psychology.³⁵ The small but growing body of Russian psychologists working on early childhood did not, in fact, publish any developmental diaries of their own, resorting instead to more generalist expositions or narrower analyses of the development of specific psychological properties, based on a mixture of original and imported materials.

Preyer remained a prominent influence in Russia into the 1900s, with references to his ideas found in articles and lectures on early childhood by Sikorskii, Lange, and the psychiatrist and neurologist Vladimir Mikhailovich Bekhterev, among others.³⁶ Russians kept abreast also of other diary-based works on early child development published by authoritative foreign psychologists, especially those working in Germany and the United States.³⁷ In the late 1900s–1910s the influence of Preyer's diary was overtaken by that of Clara and Wilhelm Louis (William) Stern, which the couple kept on their three children until 1912.³⁸ Key early publications based on these diaries were *Children's Language* (1907) and *Memory, Testimony, and Lying in Early Childhood* (1909). William also used the diaries abundantly in his *The Psychology of Early Childhood* (1914), while Clara published excerpts under the pseudonym Tony Meyer as *From the Nursery: Pages from a Mother's Diary* (1914).³⁹

THE FATHER AS PSYCHOLOGIST

It was the Sterns' work, in fact, which inspired the publication of Russia's first full parent's diary—Anatolii Feliksovich Levonevskii's *My Child* (1914).⁴⁰ The prominent psychologist

³⁵A. Nalimov, "Dva slova o roditel'skikh zapisiakh pro rebiat," *Vospitanie i obuchenie*, 1911, no. 9:275–79.

³⁶N. N. Lange, *Dusha rebenka v pervye gody zhizni* (St. Petersburg, 1892) (these were two public lectures delivered at Novorossiiskii University in 1891); Sikorskii, *Dusha rebenka: S kratkim ocherkom dal'neishei psikhicheskoi evoliutsii* (St. Petersburg, 1901); idem, *Dusha rebenka s kratkim opisaniem dushi zhyvotnykh i dushi vzroslogo cheloveka* (Kiev, 1909); V. M. Bekhterev, "Voprosy vospitaniia v vozraste pervogo detstva (v svyazi s postanovkoi ego v Pedologicheskoi institute)," *Obrazovanie*, 1909, no. 2:24–69. *The Soul of a Child* was graced with a new translation (from the 7th German edition) in 1912. Part 3 was excluded since it dealt with the development of language in a German child. To compensate, the editor, V. F. Dinze, called upon Russian parents to study their own children's language acquisition, following Preyer's example.

³⁷Among English influences one should cite the translation of William Blakely Drummond, *Introduction to Child-Study* (London, 1907); Vil'iam Bleikli Drummond, *Vvedenie v izuchenie rebenka*, trans. N. D. Vinogradov and A. A. Grombakh (Moscow, 1910). For the section on diaries see pp. 109–25.

³⁸Werner Deutsch and Christliebe El Mogharbel, "Clara and William Stern's Conception of a Developmental Science," *European Journal of Developmental Psychology* 8:2 (2011): 135–56.

³⁹See William and Clara Stern, *Die Kindersprache* (1907); idem, *Erinnerung, Aussage und Lüge in der erste Kindheit* (1909); William Stern, *Psychologie der Frühen Kindheit*; and Tony Meyer [Clara Stern], *Kindertube: Tagebuchblätter einer Mutter* (1914). See also Vil'iam Shtern, *Psikhologiia rannego detstva, do shetiletnego vozrasta: S ispol'zovaniem v kachestve materiala nenapechatannykh dnevnikov Klary Stern*, trans. M. A. Engel'gart (1915; reprint ed. Petrograd, 1922); and Klara Stern, *Iz zhizni odnoi detskoi: Listki iz dnevnika Klary Shtern v obrabotke Toni Meier*, trans. M. Gissen (Moscow and Petrograd, 1923).

⁴⁰A. F. Levonevskii, *Moi rebenok: Nabliudeniia nad psikhicheskimi razvitiem mal'chika v techenie pervykh chetyrekh let ego zhizni* (St. Petersburg, 1914). Parts of the book were published earlier in *Russkaia shkola*

Aleksandr Petrovich Nechaev contributed a preface, commending Levonevskii's initiative as the first Russian analogue to Preyer's famous work.⁴¹ At the same time, however, Nechaev presented Levonevskii as an amateur who often made unwarranted subjective speculations in his diary. As we shall see in what follows, the encouragement of parent diaries by experts and the enrolment of parents in scientific child study were invariably accompanied by an explicit *de-emphasis* of the scientific status of the diaries themselves as a means of demarcating parental contributions from those of fully qualified experts.⁴² In Nechaev's framing of Levonevskii's diary, a parent's independent interpretation of his material was scientifically illegitimate: parents were qualified only to record data and should therefore confine themselves to this endeavor. This was, indeed, how Levonevskii himself modestly presented his own book—as a mere “collection of factual material.”⁴³

Yet Levonevskii was not “just” a parent. He was an enthusiast of scientific child study, and psychology more generally, who had attended some of the courses run by Nechaev, translated Robert Eugen Gaupp's *On Child Psychology* (1909), and was at that very time translating Stern's *Children's Language*.⁴⁴ He was also an active reviewer, publishing commentaries on translations of Preyer and Stern in tsarist Russia's key pedagogical journals.⁴⁵ Levonevskii was keen to ensure that parental observations were incorporated legitimately into child study as a growing scientific enterprise. He pointed out, for instance, that in Russia experts in child psychology usually relied on foreign data and were not publishing diary observations of their own. He saw great potential in educated parents taking on this painstaking work, harnessing, for the good of science, their natural fascination with the development of their children as well as their duties and responsibilities as caregivers and educators.⁴⁶

Levonevskii also stressed the German psychologists' emphasis on “prolonged observation under natural conditions” as the only way to create a legitimate foundation of reliable data.⁴⁷ In practice, such observations could only be carried out by parents. Levonevskii argued that relevant observations and diary notations ultimately required merely a degree of “educatedness, thoughtfulness, and conscientiousness,” together with some basic knowledge of psychology, and that they were not contingent on complicated apparatuses or specialist, technical training (as was the case with experimental psychology, for instance).⁴⁸ At the same time, Levonevskii agreed that observations had to be carried out carefully and systematically in order to be taken seriously by science. Levonevskii

(1909, 1911 and 1912) under the title “Materialy k voprosu o psikhicheskom razvitii rebenka v techenie pervogo, vtorogo i tret'ego goda ego zhizni.”

⁴¹Nechaev was the founder of Russia's first laboratory in experimental educational psychology in 1901 and Professor at the Pedagogical Academy in St. Petersburg. For more on Nechaev see A. A. Romanov, *Opytno-eksperimental'naia pedagogika pervoi treti XX veka* (Moscow, 1997), 40–119; and V. V. Anshakova, *Vklad A. P. Nechaeva v stanovlenie i razvitie vozrastnoi i pedagogicheskoi psikhologii* (Astrakhan, 2002).

⁴²Nalimov, “Dva slova o roditel'skikh zapisiakh.”

⁴³Levonevskii, *Moi rebenok*, 10.

⁴⁴Robert Gaupp, *Psikhologiya rebenka* (St. Petersburg, 1909).

⁴⁵Levonevskii, “Retsenziia na knigu V. Preiera, *Dusha rebenka*,” *Pedagogicheskii sbornik*, 1913, no. 4:518–22.

⁴⁶Levonevskii, *Moi rebenok*, 5–7.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 5 (epigraph quoting Robert Gaupp).

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 7–8.

positioned the parent, and himself in particular, as a “student” or “disciple” of established authorities—the “servants of pure science”—for whom he expressed respect and admiration, especially when addressing his “mentor” (*uchitel'*), Professor Nechaev.

Levonevskii's actual scientific model, however, was the Sterns' diary. He accepted that it was normally the mother who was in the privileged position to keep this kind of diary, since she was the one always close by, enjoying an intimate relationship with the child: “An educated, culturally developed mother has all the opportunity she needs to collect on her own, without much effort, a mass of valuable material.” However, for Levonevskii, much more effective was “the collaborative work of spouses,” who could, as in the case of William and Clara Stern, discuss observations and process material together.⁴⁹ In his view, spouses were the perfect partners as they complemented and checked each other, guaranteeing thoroughness and conscientiousness.

Levonevskii imagined this parental partnership in terms of a gendered division of labor—as a combination of maternal empathetic intuition and paternal theoretical prowess: “On the one hand, who better than the mother will know and understand her child; on the other, the theoretical knowledge of the father helps [the couple] get to grips with some of the more complex issues.” This division of labor between mother and father was, in fact, a transposition of the established division of labor between the lay parent as diary-keeper (usually female) and the expert psychologist, the master of scientific theory, interpretation, and experimentation (usually male). Levonevskii also said that he, rather than his wife, was the one responsible for the ultimate output—“the scientific processing of the observations” and “the actual writing up of the present book.”⁵⁰

The Levonevskii's emulated the Sterns' method as slavishly as they could. They used the German couple's form of noting the child's age; like the Sterns, they observed life in the nursery as it happened, “with all its joys and woes,” without routinizing the scheduling of their observations, as Preyer had done in his diary-keeping. Like the Sterns' they ensured that their son Dima was never aware that he was being observed. When recording elements of language development Levonevskii would, like William Stern, sit unobtrusively somewhere not far from the child as the mother played with him; while pretending to be working, the father would be meticulously jotting down in shorthand every fragment of the little boy's speech.⁵¹

Yet Levonevskii's book was not a chronological diary in “raw” format, but a heavily edited narrative, a “monograph,” summarizing and commenting on Dima's development, fitting it into an account of the development of babies as such.⁵² The organization of the narrative follows a well-established order, moving from motor to sensory to intellectual development, concluding with speech and self-awareness. Levonevskii's text also contains occasional references to his wider reading in the field. For example, in one place he notes that midwives notice the sucking reflex in babies as early as the moment when the latter are

⁴⁹Ibid., 8–9.

⁵⁰Ibid., 9, 10.

⁵¹Ibid., 8, 9.

⁵²Rybnikov argued that Levonevskii's was the best Russian diary of this type, dubbed *dnevnik svodnogo tipa* (“Detskii dnevnik,” l. 17ob.).

exiting the womb, something clearly not based on his own observations. Elsewhere he explicitly compares his observations and conclusions to those of established authorities. For example, he disagrees with Preyer that children experience fear or surprise in their first week, and agrees with Sikorskii that these emotions develop in the third week. In another place, the account of the development of Dima's vision focus is used to confirm the stages established by Preyer.⁵³

Some parts of the book, though, do appear more like a "collection of factual material" to be passed on to the expert. For instance, there are examples of Dima's drawings, which Levonevskii shies away from interpreting, stating simply that they could serve as "auxiliary material in the study of a child's psyche."⁵⁴ However, it is not entirely clear to what extent academic psychologists were really interested in this "raw material" in and of itself. What they seemed to prize far more was the amateur enthusiast's *gift* of the diary—the very act of the respectful father laying this material at the expert's feet, with the accompanying expression of admiration and support for the science of children. Indeed, what counted here above all else was evidence of parental support for this emergent field of research. Levonevskii seemed aware of this, adding that, whatever the scientific value of the factual material he had collected, the impact of his book lay ultimately in its potential for further parental mobilization: "Nonetheless, I would think that these observations, irrespective of their scientific value, can serve as an example, as a stimulus to the production of more such observations, the absence of which ... is so badly felt by the Russian researcher."⁵⁵

However, the wider mobilization of parents did not and could not depend only on appealing to the parents' interest in contributing to science (something that might have been Levonevskii's own primary motivation). What Levonevskii also had to appeal to was the educated parents' responsibility for *vospitanie* (upbringing)—the territory of parental endeavor.⁵⁶ Thus, in relation to science, Levonevskii, as a parent-amateur, positioned himself—in modest, at times groveling, fashion (especially in his deference to Nechaev)—as unquestionably inferior. In his references to the distant foreign authorities he was rather less servile, emulating the Sterns, and being at times rather critical of the, by that time, somewhat old-fashioned Preyer. In his positioning in relation to fellow parents, though, Levonevskii claimed—specifically on account of his own active enrolment in a scientific enterprise—something of a vanguard role in that "great, difficult matter" of *vospitanie*.⁵⁷

THE DIARY OF A MAT'-VOSPITATEL'NITSA

Levonevskii's was only one case in the varied positioning of activist parents on the boundaries of expertise in early child development. A very different example is Elena Konstantinovna Krichevskaiia's *My Marusia* (1916), which, like Levonevskii's book, represents not a diary as such, but a chronological narrative of the development of Krichevskaiia's daughter, based

⁵³Levonevskii, *Moi rebenok*, 15, 19.

⁵⁴Ibid., 175.

⁵⁵Ibid., 215.

⁵⁶Ibid., 216. See also the argument in Nalimov, "Dva slova o roditel'skikh zapisiakh."

⁵⁷Levonevskii, *Moi rebenok*, 216.

on the diary she had kept on her for a period of five years.⁵⁸ Krichevskaiia's self-positioning in her narrative was different from Levonevskii's, not least because she was a woman. As we have seen, Levonevskii was in his discourse keen to "rub shoulders" with male experts—those he had read, translated, and admired as established authorities and role models. In many ways he addressed his work primarily to them, with something of a token gesture to fellow parents. Krichevskaiia, by contrast, addressed herself almost exclusively to mothers, whom she constructed both as her peers and as an audience she sought to guide.

In her book Krichevskaiia assumes, simultaneously, two distinct roles. On the one hand, she is the protagonist of the narrative as little Marusia's parent and *vospitatel'nitsa*—the "ordinary, average, educated mother" (*riadovaia, sredne-intelligentnaia mat'*).⁵⁹ On the other, her role is that of the author-narrator who introduces and frames the account—an activist in the field of early education and an already published "educator of mothers," articulating a particular form of "lay expertise" derived both from her own experiences as a mother and from her independent engagement with and tacit assimilation of established, authoritative expert advice.⁶⁰

Krichevskaiia makes no claims to scientific expertise as such. For example, she says in the introduction that she herself cannot judge how successful she has been in shedding light on her daughter's soul and is happy to put aside her own "conclusions" (the latter being the prerogative of qualified experts). Even as an "educator of mothers," Krichevskaiia is different in kind from the expert in, say, child hygiene, whether male, like Zhuk, or female, like Dernova-Iarmolenko. Nonetheless, Krichevskaiia develops maternal diary-keeping as a key practice in what could be termed "professional motherhood." Her narrative is shaped around the role of the mother as caregiver/educator, and the mother's observations and recordings of her child's development are presented as a function of this role (rather than of the forging of the science of child development per se).⁶¹ According to Krichevskaiia, a mother simply could not do her "job" properly without knowing her child's psyche,

⁵⁸E. K. Krichevskaiia, *Moia Marusia: Zapiski materi* (Petrograd, 1916). As Krichevskaiia explains, the book was made primarily out of materials from her diary, but also from information recorded in letters, as well as her own personal memories.

⁵⁹*Sredne-intelligentnaia* should here be understood as referring not to average levels of education (and certainly not to average levels of intelligence), but to a putative social position, a kind of "mean" (for a woman) within the late tsarist Russia's educated stratum (broadly "the intelligentsia").

⁶⁰E. K. Krichevskaiia, *Pis'ma o materinstve* (Petrograd, 1916). In the Soviet era Krichevskaiia continued to publish advice literature for early child upbringing, as a "pedagogue" attached to early child care consultancies run by Narkomzdrav. See E. K. Krichevskaiia, *Sovety materiam po vospitaniiu detei: Opyt pedagogicheskoi konsul'tatsii* (Moscow, 1927). On the problematic nature of the term "lay expertise" and the use of "experience-based expertise" instead see Harry Collins and Robert Evans, "The Third Wave of Science Studies: Studies of Expertise and Experience," *Social Studies of Science* 32:2 (2002): 238; and Harry Collins and Robert Evans, *Rethinking Expertise* (Chicago, 2007), 48–49. I would argue, however, that the oxymoronic "lay expertise" is worth retaining in this particular case, given that the kind of expertise that Krichevskaiia is articulating is in fact ambiguous and not strictly "experience-based."

⁶¹Krichevskaiia's chapters deal quite explicitly with problems of *vospitanie*: namely, physical *vospitanie*; *vospitanie* of the will, that is, dealing with the little girl's *kaprizi*; moral development (*nравственное развитие*), that is, an account of the child's learning right from wrong; religious *vospitanie*; and then cognitive development. Krichevskaiia concludes with the development of the sense of sociality and, finally, with a form of early sex education.

and the mode through which she acquired this knowledge was through observation and diary-keeping.⁶²

Krichevskaiia frames her book in part as an *experiential* narrative. It is, in her words, a “document of real human experience” (*chelovecheskii dokument*) that contains all that which has been “lived and thought by an average educated woman in the first five years of motherhood.”⁶³ Yet this is not just a narrative of *a mother's experience* but also, crucially, an account of the gradual acquisition of *a mother's expertise*—a kind of *Bildungsroman* of a *mat'-vospitatel'nitsa*, the story of a mother's self-discovery in this quasi-professional role, not least through the exercise of persistent diary-keeping.

A mother's diary emerges here not merely as a record of her child's evolving behaviors, or of the trials and tribulations of *vospitanie*, but also, significantly, as the mother's consideration of her own expertise: “The study of our child by us, mothers, is so closely connected with our work as educators that, when thinking and doing the former one at the same time inevitably scrutinizes and ponders over oneself as a pedagogue and a psychologist.” Moreover, as Krichevskaiia recounts how hard she had to work on herself never to lie to her daughter, nor to respond to the girl's capricious behavior, nor to be too prescriptive, controlling, and didactic when engaging her in play, the story of the *vospitanie* of little Marusia slips easily into a narrative of the *vospitanie* of Krichevskaiia as a *mat'-vospitatel'nitsa* (a supremely difficult balancing act between trusting and rationally controlling maternal instincts).⁶⁴

In setting herself up as a model, Krichevskaiia constantly presents both herself and her daughter as a kind of mean or norm, as the typical rather than the ideal. However, she is always a model in another sense as well. She presents her own path to motherhood as that of following a calling. She describes how in her late teens she perceived herself as a “potential mother” and dreamt of educating her own children. “Thoughts about the role of the mother, worthy of this name in our ‘century of the child,’” apparently took up so much of her thoughts that by the time she completed secondary school she “started to look upon motherhood as a path that best suited my strivings and objectives. And then [she] would come to realize that the mother's task—that huge task of enormous responsibility—required a calling, as well as an outstanding work ethic, and also solid and diverse forms of knowledge.”⁶⁵

After finishing high school Krichevskaiia decided to prepare for motherhood, but it proved extremely hard because she had to do this all by herself “without any solid, authoritative textbook, without like-minded peers who would have consciously chosen this same path.”⁶⁶ During this time she worked as a teacher and read many books about child upbringing and development. However, once she did finally become a mother, having given birth to Marusia, all this theoretical preparation proved insufficient and needed to be supplemented or even supplanted with actual maternal experiences and work.

⁶²Krichevskaiia, *Moia Marusia*, 3.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 4, 18–19.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 4–5. Krichevskaiia is referring to Ellen Key's famous *The Century of the Child* (New York, 1909).

⁶⁶Krichevskaiia, *Moia Marusia*, 5–8. See also *idem*, *Pis'ma o materinstve*.

A vital instrument in her formation as a mother at this stage, and an essential tool in her “job” as a *mat'-vospitatel'nitsa*, was her diary of Marusia’s development. However, Krichevskaiia declared that her diary-keeping fell short of the desired standards, something all too typical of novice mothers. With a light dose of self-mockery, she reminisced about how she had bought for this purpose a special notebook in a beautiful binding, but how what she wrote inside it remained excruciatingly dilettante. Krichevskaiia lamented (rather affectedly) that she had been so poorly prepared for the task of diary writing and more generally unable, at that time, to meet the high demands of motherhood (the *velichie materinskoi zadachi*).⁶⁷ She thereby invited her readers to contrast her young self as a failed diarist (as well as *their own* “ordinary motherhood”), with the “professional” ideal of the *mat'-vospitatel'nitsa*, which she was otherwise creating and promoting.

Krichevskaiia stressed that she devoted herself totally to “her Marusia,” who became the “meaning and purpose of [her] life as [she] understood them.” This also meant, conversely, that the task of Marusia’s *vospitanie* was “entirely in [her] hands” (including the “physical care” which would otherwise be routinely devolved to nannies).⁶⁸ In other words, Krichevskaiia presented the care and upbringing of a child of preschool age as first and foremost the mother’s own “professional” jurisdiction.⁶⁹ This idea of the mother having full responsibility for the upbringing of her child is related to contemporaneous public debates in Russia about the family and its social responsibilities, as well as campaigns to engage educated mothers much more actively in every aspect of the care of their offspring.⁷⁰ Krichevskaiia took this notion of the educated mother’s duty for *vospitanie* even further, developing a whole new ethos of “professional motherhood” as *the* role for a woman from “the intelligentsia,” fitting it, moreover, into the wider ethos of professionalization characteristic of this social stratum.

Krichevskaiia also tacitly positioned the “professional mother” within the wider structure of professions and expertise operating on this same territory of early child care, upbringing, and education. Doctors were at that time considered the most authoritative experts in matters of early child care, so articulating the mother’s relationship to medical expertise was particularly important. Krichevskaiia said that, like most mothers, she had been a “total layman (*profan*) in medical matters,” taking, for example, even the mildest of sicknesses much too seriously.⁷¹ However, what she was actually demarcating here was the role of

⁶⁷Krichevskaiia, *Moia Marusia*, 3, 7–8.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁹This was in line with juridical articulations of parental responsibilities discussed at this time. See A. Rabinovich, *Roditeli, deti i rodstvenniki* (Moscow, 1912), 4–70. See also A. I. Zagorovskii, “Otnosheniia mezhdru roditeliami i det'mi,” *Zhurnal ministerstva iustitsii*, 1902, no. 1:45–84, and no. 2:1–30. For wider cultural historical context on legislation concerning the family in late tsarist Russia see William G. Wagner, *Marriage, Property, and Law in Late Imperial Russia* (Oxford, 1994).

⁷⁰At the First All-Russian Conference on Family Education (1912–13) debate raged over the question of whether preschool upbringing and education should be devolved from the family to social institutions; there were considerable concerns that this might impact detrimentally on an apparently already shaky family structure. See “Vserossiiskii s'ezd po semeinomu vospitaniiu,” *Svobodnoe vospitanie*, 1912–13, no. 4:115–22; “Rezoliutsii i pozhelaniia I-go Vserossiiskogo S'ezda po semeinomu vospitaniiu,” *Pedagogicheskii listok*, 1913, no. 4:299–310; and *Trudy pervogo vserossiiskogo s'ezda po semeinomu vospitaniiu*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1914).

⁷¹Krichevskaiia, *Moia Marusia*, 12.

doctors specifically as clinicians, as those who treated illness and whose practical function in child care and upbringing was confined to intervening in cases of acute pathology. In the realm of hygiene and prophylaxis, a fuzzier boundary between medical expertise and parental child care emerges, one in which the “professional mother” engages more actively, freely, and confidently. Thus, Krichevskaiia describes how after reading a number of accessible manuals in the hygiene of early childhood she adopted and implemented independently a host of useful prophylactic measures.⁷²

As a model *mat'-vospitatel'nitsa*, Krichevskaiia also enacted *in practice* (in the organization and implementation of the care of Marusia) *the rhetoric* of the hygiene experts’ construction of “modern” child care—namely, the rhetoric of the condemnation of traditional peasant child care practices, against which the “rationality” of modern child care was built.⁷³ In this context, the fashioning of the “modern mother” by the experts and of the *mat'-vospitatel'nitsa* by Krichevskaiia were linked also to an assertion of social status (that of a member of the middle-class professional intelligentsia) via the discourse of hygiene and modern pedagogy—that is, through the forceful critique of the “uneducated and uncultured” child care practices of the mothers’ social inferiors, namely peasant nannies, whose role was homologous to that of the *mat'-vospitatel'nitsa*.

Indeed, in Krichevskaiia’s narrative the anti-model of the “professional mother,” the one which Krichevskaiia is pitted against, is Marusia’s nanny.⁷⁴ Krichevskaiia is insistent that as an *intelligentnaia mat'* she did not allow anyone lower than her socially or culturally to act as her assistant. If she relied on advice from anyone, this had to be an acquaintance from the same social milieu. Krichevskaiia deliberately and systematically excluded the nanny from raising her child: “as an uncultured, ignorant creature, and a poor pedagogue” the *niania* was not someone to whom she could entrust the nurturing of her child in any meaningful way; in her view, nannies could only be “a hindrance to the proper upbringing of children.”⁷⁵ Marusia’s *niania* was consequently treated as just another servant and the child was never left alone with her. Krichevskaiia did not even allow the nanny to take the child out for walks or, “God forbid, ‘occupy’ her in some way!”⁷⁶

Thus, in Krichevskaiia’s narrative, the positioning of the “professional mother” appears somewhere between the excluded uncultured *niania* and the authoritative, but absent, physician. However, the closest analogue of the mother as a *vospitatel'nitsa* was, in fact, the teacher: the “professional mother” was a kind of “pedagogue” for the initial years of the child’s life (after which actual schoolteachers were expected to take over). Moreover, the relationship that the *mat'-vospitatel'nitsa* established with expertise in child *psychology*

⁷²Ibid., 13–14.

⁷³Kelly, *Growing up in Russia*, 287–386; Nancy M. Frieden, “Child Care: Medical Reform in a Traditionalist Culture,” in *The Family in Imperial Russia*, 236–59; Elizabeth Waters, “The Modernisation of Russian Motherhood, 1917–1937,” *Soviet Studies* 44:1 (1992): 123–35.

⁷⁴This construction of the nanny contrasts the traditional idealized construction of this figure in the culture of the Russian nobility. See Grant, *Russian Nanny, Real and Imagined*. See also Orlando Figes, *Natasha’s Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (London, 2002), 119–30.

⁷⁵Krichevskaiia, *Moia Marusia*, 11. Dernova-Iarmolenko too criticized educated parents for delegating the difficult and highly responsible matter of education to uneducated nannies (*Dnevnik materi*, 3). See also Dernova-Iarmolenko, *Azbuka materi: Pervye uroki po ukhodu za rebenkom* (Moscow, 1912).

⁷⁶Krichevskaiia, *Moia Marusia*, 11.

resembled closely the relationship that schoolteachers were at this very same time negotiating with academic psychologists.⁷⁷

PSYCHOLOGISTS' CLAIM OVER PARENTS' DIARIES

There was, however, a significant difference in the “method” around which the parents’ and the teachers’ links with psychology as a science were being forged: whereas for parents the key boundary practice with psychology was diary-keeping, for schoolteachers it was mental testing.⁷⁸ In the long run mental tests proved more controversial than parents’ diaries, partly because debates about psychological testing affected definitions of psychology as an experimental science in a fundamental way. This was because of the importance that the notion of “the experiment” had for psychology’s claims to scientific status at this time, and also because battles over jurisdiction were more heated in psychologists’ interactions with teachers as an actual profession in search of its own legitimacy, status, and expertise, which parents were of course not (despite isolated efforts, such as Krichevskaiia’s, to forge something akin to “professional motherhood”).⁷⁹

However, as we shall see in what follows, discussions of parents’ diaries of child development in early twentieth-century Russia still entailed important forms of “boundary work” through which psychologists carefully negotiated the role that parent diaries might legitimately play in the science of psychology.⁸⁰ This involved the need for the systematic framing of parent diaries by the discourse of qualified psychologists. Such framing entailed, first of all, maintaining a distinction between merely keeping a diary, on the one hand, and publishing it, on the other.

Keeping a diary was something that “ordinary” parents, as a rule mothers, might take up on their own initiative, following any number of motivations through which an educated woman would choose to fashion herself as a parent. This might involve the channeling of “maternal instincts” into a particular genre of writing as a typical intelligentsia practice or simply following a vogue current in the woman’s social circle or the milieu she might be looking up to; inspiration might come from forums such as parent circles or through the woman’s enrolment in the “professionalization” of motherhood and the “modernization” of child care.

The *publication* of a diary entailed, however, radical reframing through which the diary acquired a new—second-order—context, function, and audience. This was not merely

⁷⁷See Byford, “Psychology at High School”; and idem, “Turning Pedagogy into a Science: Teachers and Psychologists in Late Imperial Russia (1897–1917),” *Osiris* 23 (2008): 50–81.

⁷⁸See, for example, E. A. Budilova, “Polemika o psikhologicheskome eksperimente na Vserossiiskikh s'ezdakh po pedagogicheskoi psikhologii,” in *Istoriia stanovleniia i razvitiia eksperimental'no-psikhologicheskikh issledovanii v Rossii*, ed. B. F. Lomov et al. (Moscow, 1990), 76–86.

⁷⁹On the role that the critique of mental testing played in the demise of pedology in the 1930s see Nikolai Kurek, *Istoriia likvidatsii pedologii i psikhotehniki* (St. Petersburg, 2004).

⁸⁰See Thomas F. Gieryn, “Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-science: Strains and Interests in Professional Ideologies of Scientists,” *American Sociological Review* 48 (1983): 781–95; idem, *Cultural Boundaries of Science: Credibility on the Line* (Chicago, 1999); and Anne Holmquest, “The Rhetorical Strategy of Boundary-Work,” *Argumentation* 4 (1990): 235–58.

a question of editing the text of “raw” diary notation.⁸¹ Publication crucially created a split between the position of “the parent” (the person keeping a diary) and “the editor/publisher” who, as a rule, assumed the position of “the expert” introducing the diary to an audience, commenting on it, evaluating it, and fitting it into one context or another. We have seen in Levonevskii’s and Krichevskaiia’s case that because they were both the diarists and the authors of the publications that came out of their diaries, their roles were split in a number of significant ways. Levonevskii was situated somewhere between his wife (as a fellow, but silent and largely sidelined, observer-diarist), and Nechaev (as mentor-expert), against the backdrop of the Stern couple as an ambiguous model (“mere” spouses/parents, yet with William being simultaneously an authoritative psychologist). A key splitting of roles is also to be found in the gendered division of labor between the spouses—the (lay) mother-caregiver/observer and the (scientifically minded) father-observer/author. In Krichevskaiia’s case, too, we saw other types of splitting, especially between her as “the average mother,” the model *mat’-vospitatel’nitsa*, and “the educator of mothers.”

However, in the late 1910s–early 1920s, practically all parents’ diaries that appeared in print were published through the intervention of professional psychologists, involving a much clearer division of roles between the lay diarist and the expert diary editor/publisher. In this period, which was something of a heyday of published parent diaries in Russia, Nikolai Aleksandrovich Rybnikov was particularly active in enrolling parents into diary-keeping, specifically in the context of building a methodology of psychological study.⁸² Rybnikov was based at the Moscow Institute of Psychology from 1912, first as an assistant, later, in the Soviet era, as professor. However, the institution that served as the initial base for Rybnikov’s diary-collecting enterprise was the Pedagogical Museum affiliated to the Teachers’ House in Moscow (PM UD), and from 1921 the Central Pedological Institute (TsPI).⁸³

Contrary to both Levonevskii’s and Krichevskaiia’s publications, diaries published under Rybnikov’s editorship came out in the form of the “raw” day-by-day notations in which they were kept. The diary itself was thereby marked off very clearly in both format and style from the expert’s introduction. Furthermore, the psychologist’s commentary

⁸¹The fact of editing was, of course, very important too, as we have seen in both Levonevskii’s and Krichevskaiia’s books, in which actual diaries were transformed into carefully organized narratives as a function of their authors’ different positioning on the boundaries of scientific expertise and professional identity.

⁸²On Rybnikov see F. N. Gonobolin, “75-letie Professora N. A. Rybnikova,” *Voprosy psikhologii*, 1956, no. 1:116–17; and M. E. Botsmanova and E. P. Guseva, “Nikolai Aleksandrovich Rybnikov (obzor arkhivnykh materialov),” *Voprosy psikhologii*, 1997, no. 6:96–108.

⁸³The Teacher’s House (Uchitel’skii Dom) in Moscow was set up in 1912 by the Moscow Teacher’s Institute’s Mutual Aid Society. It was envisaged as a center devoted to reforming education based on scientific principles and to promoting the findings of child science and educational research, primarily to the wider teaching masses, but also to preschool *vospitateli* and parents. The Teacher’s House had its Pedagogical Museum, the task of which was to collect and study materials on child development, to curate exhibitions and to publish a series of manuals (“Biblioteka Pedagogicheskogo muzeia Uchitel’skogo doma v Moskve”). The Museum had four sections—the pedological, pedagogical, ethnographic, and applied. For the PM UD’s program of activities see Rybnikov, *Kak izuchat’ rebenka* (Moscow, 1916). See also NA RAO, f. 47, op. 1, d. 45. On the TsPI see Rybnikov, *Dva goda raboty Tsentral’nogo pedologicheskogo instituta, 1921–23* (Moscow, 1923). See also E. G. Bibanova and N. A. Rybnikov, *Kak izuchat’ rebenka: Rukovodstvo k izucheniiu rebenka ot rozhdeniia do trekh let* (Orlov, 1923); and NA RAO, f. 47, op. 1, dd. 46–47.

invariably stressed the distinct register of the diary discourse, making sure to highlight its non-scientific (subjective, emotive, feminine) character. This framing inevitably transformed the diarist-mother from an observer of her child's development into an object of expert evaluation.⁸⁴

The first full diaries of this kind to be published were by N. I. Gavrilova and M. P. Stakhorskaia, which came out in a single volume in 1916, edited by Rybnikov and Konstantin Nikolaevich Kornilov—his friend and colleague at the Moscow Institute of Psychology.⁸⁵ The diaries, which complement each other, follow the development of Gavrilova's son from birth to the age of three, and Stakhorskaia's son mainly from years four to seven.

The publisher's advertisements stressed that "the Russian mother" would find in this book many useful pieces of information regarding early child care and upbringing, thereby promoting it as a form of maternal "experience sharing."⁸⁶ However, "raw" as the information contained in these diaries might have been, its communication was not independent and spontaneous, but mobilized and mediated by experts, who marketed them as "courses for parents." Even as such, the editors construed mothers' diaries as inevitably flawed, promoting them largely on account of their being accessible and engaging, usefully inviting empathy and identification in the target audience.

However, what Rybnikov as the principal mobilizer of parents' diaries also wanted and needed to negotiate was the scientific value of these diaries—namely, the extent to which such diaries could and should be used as sources of "factual material" in the scientific study of childhood and in the building of the methodology of psychology as a science. Rybnikov and others saw that they could (and in many ways had to) delegate the systematic observation of infants and toddlers to engaged intelligentsia parents, but they needed to ensure the legitimacy of such observations, given that these were being carried out by unqualified persons thought to be unreliable.⁸⁷

We have already seen in Nechaev's preface to Levonevskii's diary that, in the context of science, parents were entitled at best only to supply "raw data." Yet even in this case, their contribution—and that of mothers in particular—remained controversial. The level of qualification expected of mothers was not, of necessity, particularly high. "Of course," noted Rybnikov, "such data can have a certain value in the psychological sense only if the task is taken up by an educated mother who has *some* knowledge of a psychological nature."⁸⁸ But precisely because of this, even educated mothers never could be entirely trusted to be objective. Indeed, in Rybnikov's own estimation, the scientific value of Gavrilova and

⁸⁴For example, when Dernova-Iarmolenko published a short anonymous excerpt from a mother's diary (E. B., "Iz dnevnika materi"), she prefaced it with information about the parents, as part of accounting for the context of "heredity." She detailed the parents' age and family history, dwelling on the fact that the mother was a teacher, leading a stressful life, and that there was a history of alcoholism, tuberculosis and mental illness on her side of the family.

⁸⁵N. I. Gavrilova and M. P. Stakhorskaia, *Dnevnik materi* (Moscow, 1916).

⁸⁶See advert on the jacket of Rybnikov, *Kak izuchat' rebenka*.

⁸⁷See Rybnikov, "Detskie dnevniki," ll. 17ob.–21ob. Rybnikov presented the incorporation of parents' diaries into the methodology of psychology as something natural and inevitable, with psychologists simply aiming to instill in this spontaneous parental practice some sort of "plan, organization and uniformity in the methods of fixing and processing of material" (ll. 11ob.–12).

⁸⁸Rybnikov, *Kak izuchat' rebenka*, 9 (emphasis added).

Stakhorskaia diaries was quite limited, since these were not “sufficiently comprehensive, systematic, objective, or accurate.”⁸⁹

Fathers tended to be viewed as more objective parent-observers, as closer to experts in their stance and attitude, although fathers’ diaries were an exception rather than the rule. The next diary to be published by Rybnikov under the auspices of the PM UD was, however, a father’s diary—N. Sokolov’s *Life of a Child* (1918).⁹⁰ Sokolov was a teacher and had kept the diary himself, describing the life of his son Boris to the age of five and a half, and more episodically during the boy’s first school years. As in the case of Levonevskii, the fact that Sokolov was male led commentators like Rybnikov almost automatically to construe this diary as more “objective” than the typical mother’s diary: “Given that the author of the notes is the father, the diary has a rather more objective character than most mothers’ diaries.”⁹¹ The descriptors “objective” and “subjective” here referred primarily to the degree of the parent’s emotional attitude toward the child. Evidence of Sokolov’s supposedly “objective” (male) gaze is found, for instance, in his first impressions of the newborn as “just a little piece of meat.”⁹²

IN SEARCH OF OBJECTIVITY: STANDARDIZING THE DIARY METHOD

“Manly self-restraint” was an important metaphor of “objectivity” at this time, but in itself it was clearly insufficient in legitimizing parents’ diaries as an objective method in psychology.⁹³ Turning parents’ diaries into a suitable methodology was a far more complex and elaborate affair. As a method, the diary of child development was conceptualized as a variant of psychological “observation” (as opposed to “experimentation”). It was accepted as the primary method of research into *early* development, dominating this subfield of child study thanks to authorities such as Darwin, Preyer, William Stern, and others.⁹⁴ However, while “classical” diaries carried out by established authorities were seen as paradigmatic of the required scientific standards, diaries written by ordinary parents were invariably presented as suffering from intrinsic methodological flaws. Yet the stress on the importance of the “natural” conditions that this type of observation required, and the fact

⁸⁹Rybnikov, “Detskie dnevniki,” I. 15ob.

⁹⁰N. Sokolov, *Zhizn' rebenka: Po dnevniku ottsa. Zapiski o dushevnom razviti rebenka ot rozhdeniia do 5½ let* (Moscow, 1918).

⁹¹Rybnikov, “Detskie dnevniki,” I. 16ob.

⁹²See the discussion in V. A. Rybnikova-Shilova, *Moi dnevnik: Zapiski o razviti rebenka ot rozhdeniia do 3-kh let* (Orlov, 1923), 158.

⁹³Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York, 2007), 257. See also K. N. Kornilov, *Metodika issledovaniia rebenka rannego vozrasta: Rukovodstvo dlia pedagogov i vrachei* (Moscow, 1921), 5 (“Our observations of a child must be governed by cold reason”).

⁹⁴The study of early child development involved experimental methods too, of course. In Russia, the most significant was the work carried out at V. M. Bekhterev’s Pedological Institute (founded in St. Petersburg in 1907). See, for example, S. D. Vladychko, “K voprosu ob obektivnykh priznakakh reaktsii sosredotocheniia pri slukhovykh razdrazheniakh u detei,” *Vestnik psikhologii, kriminal'noi antropologii i gipnotizma*, 1909, no. 3:222–53. However, even here experiments were combined with systematic observational diaries kept by the Institute’s *vospitatel'nitsy*. See, for example, Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, f. 2265, op. 1, d. 926, ll. 1–7, and f. 2265, op. 1, d. 929, ll. 1–6. Experimentation was considered a no-go zone for parents, who were deemed insufficiently qualified for it (Kornilov, *Metodika issledovaniia rebenka*, 7).

that the child was expected to be observed for a long period by a person familiar to them, made parents the most suitably positioned observers.

Psychologists such as Rybnikov had a strategy, however, to resolve this contradiction. First, they incorporated parents' diaries into broader programs of child study, in which parents as observers would be mobilized as only one cog in a bigger wheel. Parents were thus recruited as suppliers of potentially pertinent data alongside others working with children in a more professional capacity—namely, the emergent body of preschool *vospitatel'nitsy*, family and school doctors, and schoolteachers. In this context, “the parent” (above all “the mother”) was often cast as a typical example of the kind of subjectivism that diary-keepers more generally, including actual parents, should do their best to avoid. Second, psychologists invested considerable efforts in standardizing this type of observational data-gathering through the publication of extensive methodological guidelines, prestructured templates, and ready-made questionnaires, the aim of which was to instrumentalize and discipline the practice. And third, they proposed to collect as many parent diaries as possible, so that even though individual diaries might be imperfect and unrepresentative in and of themselves, collectively (thanks to the standardization of their coding) they would form an objective database that scientists could rely on in their analyses.

Efforts to standardize parental diary-keeping must be situated in the context of wider strategies of methodological standardization (including the rise of statistics) in the field of child study in the 1900s–1920s, which also affected mental tests, surveys, and other methods. Such standardization should arguably be seen less as a means of dominating research practice through the imposition of a particular methodological discipline, and more as a device of mobilization—a means of enrolling a wide and disparate range of participants, with a variety of interests and agendas, into a collaborative endeavor.

Rhetorically, this mobilization involved a dual strategy of engagement. On the one hand, the groups targeted were promised to be equipped with supposedly already established scientific instruments, which they could then use for their own purposes. On the other, they were being invited to contribute (with their observations) to the building of child science as a new enterprise, which, being still in the making, “knocks on the doors of family homes and schools, summoning parents' observations, teachers' notes, and doctors' investigations.”⁹⁵

Standardized methods for observing children were promoted as tools that would help parents (or anyone involved in the care and upbringing of young children) generate objective and impartial, systematic and exhaustive “profiles” (*kharakteristiki*) of individual children under their care. These profiles, which could be understood as synthetic snapshots of the child's individual personality (*lichnost'*), usually situated somewhere within a broad typology, also would allow parents to assess, in the form of a “diagnosis,” how well the child was developing based on established norms.⁹⁶ An early example of such a program for standardized observation was Grigory Ivanovich Rossolimo's *A Plan for Studying the Child's*

⁹⁵G. I. Rossolimo, *Plan issledovaniia detskoi dushi: Posobie dlia roditelei i pedagogov* (Moscow, 1906), 3.

⁹⁶For a classic typology of children's characters and their links to particular forms of home upbringing see P. F. Lesgaft, *Semeinoe vospitanie rebenka i ego znachenie*, 2d ed. (St. Petersburg, 1893), pt. 1. See also its discussion in Kelly, *Growing up in Russia*, 359–60. This particular, vivid, yet idiosyncratic, classification would not, however, have been used as such in the standardization discussed here.

Soul (1906).⁹⁷ It was promoted to parents, teachers, and doctors as an “instruction for compiling a child’s profile with the help of the method of observation,” for use in both the home and the school environment (although Rossolimo originally developed it in the context of assessing inmates in institutions for juvenile offenders).⁹⁸

Rybnikov, too, envisaged the standardization of parental diary-keeping as a means of creating tools for the psychological study of personality: data assembled in a diary was meant to be distillable into a “psychological card” or “psychogram,” envisaged as “a kind of psychological photograph.”⁹⁹ The diary itself became a “psychological monograph,” while diary writing became “psychography,” partly in the etymological sense of “description of the soul,” but with a clear allusion to “photography.”¹⁰⁰

Photography, as both technology and metaphor, played a prominent role in the construction of scientific objectivity at this time.¹⁰¹ This was the case also in the Russian experts’ efforts to turn parents’ diaries into objective scientific instruments. In 1914, Dernova-Iarmolenko argued explicitly that in order for a mother’s diary to be truly valuable “it is necessary that in it life is copied with the accuracy of a photographic camera.” Moreover, it was important “that these photographs also reflect the surrounding environment and do not place the child outside it as something isolated, self-sufficient.” Continuing the analogy, Dernova-Iarmolenko argued that “the photograph should be taken not in the photographer’s studio, but in the environment in which the child is living”; in other words, “the photographers will be people close to the child, namely parents, and they have plenty of time and space to engage in this.”¹⁰²

A more extensive attempt at standardizing observational methodologies in the study of early childhood was Rybnikov’s *How to Study the Child* (1916), a manual, published simultaneously with Gavrilova and Stakhorskaia’s diaries, in which Rybnikov brought together a host of different programs for gathering observational data on children (as

⁹⁷Rossolimo, *Plan issledovaniia detskoi dushi*. While in this first, 1906 edition, parents were named in the first place as key stakeholders, potential beneficiaries and a significant section of those to be mobilized, in the third edition the doctors become the primary audience and the *kharakteristika* of the child was promoted as a much more specialist, scientific form of case history, leading to a proper “diagnosis” (Rossolimo, *Plan issledovaniia detskoi dushi: Posobie dlia pedagogov, vrachei i roditelei pri sostavlenii kharakteristiki normal’nykh i defektivnykh detei* [Moscow, 1922]).

⁹⁸Rossolimo, *Plan issledovaniia detskoi dushi* (1906), 3–4.

⁹⁹The defectologist Vsevolod Petrovich Kashchenko developed something similar, calling it *pedograficheskii metod* resulting in *pedogrammy* (NA RAO, f. 139, op. 1, d. 98a; for an example of a *pedogramma* see *ibid.*, dd. 51–52).

¹⁰⁰Rybnikov, “Biograficheskii metod v psikhologii,” in *Ditia v ego zhizni i tvorchestve: Pedagogicheskii sbornik*, ed. I. M. Solov’ev (Moscow, 1918), 8. Experts’ instructions on diary-keeping also recommended to parents to include in them actual photos of the child. Such photos were sometimes printed in published diaries.

¹⁰¹Daston and Galison argue that the idea behind scientific photography was not the older principle of truth-to-nature, but rather the elimination of subjectivity: “A photograph was deemed scientifically objective because it countered a specific kind of scientific subjectivity: intervention to aestheticize or theorize the seen,” that is, the observer’s “projection of their own preconceptions and theories onto data and images” (*Objectivity*, 135).

¹⁰²Dernova-Iarmolenko, “Kak pisat’ dnevniki: Prakticheskie zametki,” *Semeinoe vospitanie*, 1914, no. 1:42, 43. The early twentieth century was precisely the era when photography had left the photographer’s studio and had become (through the introduction of Kodak’s Brownie camera by George Eastman in 1900), something ordinary people could engage in (just as ordinary parents could now supposedly create “photographically” objective records of their child’s development in their own homes).

systematized at the PM UD).¹⁰³ Its aim was to give expert direction to nonspecialists mobilized into child study: “Undoubtedly, the valuable instructions in programs compiled by specialists will give greater accuracy and systematicity to the observations made by persons interested in questions of child psychology.” In particular, such prestructured programs for observing children were expected to help mothers detach the subjective from the objective: “This will help [the mother] separate actual manifestations of the child psyche from associated interpretations; it will give her the ability to identify more accurately this or that expression of the child’s psyche—in general, it will prevent her from potentially making errors and it will give greater accuracy to her notations.”¹⁰⁴

During the late 1910s and early 1920s, Rybnikov and others spelt out a whole series of concrete principles that a parent diarist should adhere to in order to ensure the requisite objectivity of diary notation.¹⁰⁵ These included: being precise about the child’s exact age (indicating year, month, and day); taking notes chronologically, as regularly as possible, and with minimal delay, ideally in shorthand for the sake of speed; registering everything exhaustively, but noting only objective manifestations and avoiding subjective remarks (if the latter are present they needed to be clearly demarcated from facts; equally, any information obtained second-hand needed to be marked off as such); precise unambiguous descriptive terms should be used; observation should be carried out in natural, authentic conditions and primarily spontaneous behavior should be observed; the child should be unaware that s/he is being observed; not only should the first appearance of a behavior be recorded, but subsequent, regular manifestations as well; observations should be made at all times of the day, reserving special scheduling only for anthropometric measurements; photographs of the child at different ages should be taken and attached to the diary; the child’s drawings and other handicraft should be archived and annotated.¹⁰⁶

THE AUTHENTICITY OF A MOTHER’S CONFESSION

In the early 1920s, Rybnikov organized the collection of parent diaries primarily from the TsPI, which had a wide-ranging child study program, based on different methodologies, including the archiving and publication of parents’ diaries of early child development.¹⁰⁷ The TsPI maintained regular contact with parent-diarists who were viewed as its researchers

¹⁰³See Rybnikov, *Kak izuchat’ rebenka*. See also idem, *Metody izucheniia rebenka* (Orel, 1923).

¹⁰⁴Rybnikov, *Kak izuchat’ rebenka*, 3, 9–10.

¹⁰⁵In addition to Rybnikov’s *Kak izuchat’ rebenka* and *Metody izucheniia rebenka* see his *Vvedenie v izuchnie rebenka* (Minsk, 1921); Kornilov, *Metodika issledovaniia rebenka rannego vozrasta*; and Bibanova and Rybnikov, *Kak izuchat’ rebenka*. While these 1920s manuals were associated with the standardization of observations expected of parents, they were addressed primarily to professional staff (for example, *vospitatel’nitsy* and doctors working in nurseries and kindergartens). The latter groups were growing in number during the early 1920s with the expansion of state-run social child care, which is why psychologists at this time began to focus on them rather more than on the parents.

¹⁰⁶Methodological principles of parental diary-keeping remained largely unchanged through the 1920s–1940s. See Rybnikov, “Detskie dnevniki,” especially the appendix “Instruktsii k provedeniiu dlitel’nykh nabliudenii za razvitiem rebenka (dnevnikovyykh zapisei)” (ll. 20–21ob).

¹⁰⁷The archiving of parent diaries required the filing of essential contextual information, which Rybnikov called the diary’s “Passport” (“Detskie dnevniki,” l. 22).

on the ground, a kind of “institute of correspondents, carrying out systematic observations locally in the conditions of the home environment,” contributing consciously to the Institute’s broader program.¹⁰⁸ Construed as records of child development and socialization *in the home*, parents’ diaries were to complement related diary-based observations carried out by the *vospitatel'nitsy* working in nurseries (*iasli*) and children’s homes (*detdoma*).

The first diary to come out under the auspices of the TsPI was V. A. Rybnikova-Shilova’s *My Diary* (1923).¹⁰⁹ This diary was more detailed than those published earlier, and it was accompanied not only by Rybnikov’s preface but also by two more detailed expert commentaries, which discussed this diary as an exemplar of “good practice” in the context of scientific child study (pedology) as well as early child care and pedagogy (*vospitanie*). Rybnikov in his preface presented Rybnikova-Shilova’s effort as serving all the necessary functions expected of a mother’s diary: it was an experiential narrative of motherhood; it was an accessible “course in pedology” as well as a “course in the pedagogy of early childhood,” of use to all those caring for young children; it was a sociohistorical and anthropological “record of everyday reality,” a testimony of Russian living conditions in a difficult period (the Civil War); and, finally, it was a “biographical document,” the “biography of a little person.”¹¹⁰ However, the most significant part of the framing and legitimation of Rybnikova-Shilova’s diary lay in the original negotiation of the value of subjectivity—specifically motherly subjectivity—in the production of observational data of relevance to pedology. This was articulated in the first expert commentary, titled “The Evaluation of the Diary from the Viewpoint of Pedology” and signed with the pseudonym Oen.¹¹¹

As discussed above, most expert commentary on parents’ diaries defined good practice as the systematic registration of sheer “fact” through impartial observation and standardized notation. While it was recognized that parents were unlikely to be consistently objective, they were urged to strive for objectivity. Rybnikova-Shilova’s diary was, however, legitimized on entirely new terms: in his exposition, Oen presented maternal subjectivity as no longer something to be excluded but, on the contrary, as the defining feature of a mother’s diary as a scientific instrument for the study of early child development. Insofar as Rybnikova-Shilova’s diary was a discursive embodiment of a mother’s observation of her child, it could be seen as fundamentally true to the mother’s authentic, natural relationship

¹⁰⁸Rybnikova-Shilova, *Moi dnevnik*, iii.

¹⁰⁹Ibid. Rybnikov edited the book and supplied the preface.

¹¹⁰In the course of the 1920s–1940s, Rybnikov framed diaries of child development increasingly also as historically specific socio-anthropological case studies of a particular type of family. He also framed parents’ diaries as variants of what he called the “biographical method.” In this context, Rybnikov considered parents’ diaries as “biographical documents” or biographies of “little persons” (*malen'kikh chelovechkov*). See, by Rybnikov, “Biograficheskii metod v psikhologii”; *Biograficheskii institut* (Moscow, 1918); *Biografii i ikh izuchenie* (Moscow, 1920); and *Izuchenie biografii: Temy seminarii, ukazatel' literatury* (Moscow, 1922).

¹¹¹Rybnikova-Shilova, *Moi dnevnik*, 142–66. I have not been able to establish the identity of the person signed Oen. The writing is impersonal and its gender is difficult to establish on this basis. However, Rybnikov introduces the article as “stat'ia Oena” (p. iii), and it is unlikely that he would have used the masculine genitive ending here if the person in question were female (in that case it is more likely he would have said “stat'ia Oen”). The second commentary, titled “Pedagogicheskaiia otsenka dnevnika Shilovoi,” penned by E. K. Krichevskaiia (pp. 167–71), discusses the values of this diary in the formation of a *mat'-vospitatel'nitsa*—the role that we have seen Krichevskaiia develop in her own diary and other publications.

to and engagement with the child. This was closely related to the psychologists' demand for diaries to record the child's "spontaneous" behavior in a "natural" environment. According to Oen, in contrast to those parent-diarists whose approach was "influenced by factors arising from culture, such as scientific ideas, professional duties, etc.," Rybnikova-Shilova's diary exemplified a "natural observational stance arising from real-life needs," namely those of "the mother's care for her son."¹¹²

Rybnikova-Shilova herself highlighted the subjectivity of her observations, using the same gendering of the objective vs. the subjective (as male vs. female) that we saw in earlier examples. Comparing her own diary-keeping to that found in Sokolov's *Life of a Child*, she argued that "the mother [in contrast to the father] cannot be just a calm observer who perfectly objectively conveys her observations." Feigning regret for her lack of objectivity, she presented her diary as an anti-model of the standards normally recommended by psychologists, given that "evidently, the methods of precise registration—as expected of those diaries that are to be directly used by science—are totally alien to me."¹¹³

Remarkably, Oen made this subjectivism of Rybnikova-Shilova's diary—namely, the fact that her son was viewed strictly through the prism of the mother's experiences—into the key methodological virtue of a mother's diary. The subjectivity inherent in a mother's diary discourse was no longer something extrinsic or episodic to be purged or sidelined by science. Instead, Oen construed the subjectivity of the mother's observations as inherent in the factuality of what was being observed: "In that respect, the mother's very *impressions* (*vpechatleniia*) of the child, the emotional states (*nastroeniia*) that the child brings out in her by whichever means—represent genuine *factual* material."¹¹⁴

The reason for this was that, in Oen's view, the object of study was not the developing child in and of itself, but "the natural union of mother and child." Oen thereby turned the mother's diary into a "natural history" of the interactions between mother and child. In this context, the mother's subjectivity could no longer be understood in the usual sense, as a form of personal bias or pure invention. Rybnikova-Shilova's envelopment of the details of her son's behavior with her own emotions and anxieties was not to be seen as somehow distorting of reality or as burdening the factual record with extraneous noise.¹¹⁵

Yet the diary could not be reduced to a "display" of the mother-child dyad, either. As a method it remained also a form of observation by the mother. However, this observation was no longer to be understood as the mother's observation only of the child; it was also, simultaneously, the mother-caregiver's and mother-diarist's self-observation. Maternal subjectivism was thereby layered in a significant way with a distinct form of reflexivity which Oen (and others) presented as a form of maternal confession (*ispoved'*). What was meant by the latter was not simply a discursive form in which a mother could "pour out her

¹¹²Rybnikova-Shilova, *Moi dnevniki*, 146 (emphases added).

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 143, 147. This is also evident in Rybnikova-Shilova's account of the division of labor between her and her husband (referred to as *otets*), who features in the diary now and again. The father's key duties seem to be to carry out physical measurements of the boy, as well as take photos of him (as recommended by the experts' child study program). He is also presented as usefully intervening in moments of panic as the voice of reason, providing some calming, common sense advice.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 150.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 146, 149.

maternal joys and woes” (to which the large smattering of emotive exclamation marks in Rybnikova-Shilova’s text would testify). Nor was the diary-as-confession merely a form of self-reporting or self-accounting—a quasi-professional *otchet* or *samouchet*.¹¹⁶

What emerges as crucial in Oen’s interpretation of Rybnikova-Shilova’s diary was that her “confession” was viewed as a highly self-conscious form of self-criticism—a mother’s relentless acknowledgment of her errors.¹¹⁷ Indeed, it was the errors that made the confession and thereby led to truth. Already in 1914, Dernova-Iarmolenko stressed the importance of “truthfully describing one’s interactions with the child,” and encouraged mothers to note down both good and bad actions, promising them that they would not be judged for the latter: “A diary is not an interrogation room. No one is being cross-examined here, no one is being judged.”¹¹⁸ For Rybnikova-Shilova herself, the purpose of her confessions was cathartic: she kept it in order “to overcome my failings, to lower myself to the very fundament of my inadequacies, in order to drink from their bitterness and thereby free the necessary energy to strive for other, greater achievements.”¹¹⁹

Through her confessional narrative, the mother is thereby transformed into a new kind of subject-object of observation—one that truthfully and authentically reveals herself through her own observation. A mother’s diary here acquires value to science only if all is revealed—honestly, openly, fully displaying her maternal self, without, crucially, attempting to conceal it with quasi-objectivity. Put somewhat differently, the mother’s observations of her child cannot be truthful if she were to try to imitate the standard methods of objective science; a mother’s observations, being intrinsically subjective, become true (and hence scientifically pertinent) only through a form of total confession.

Oen praised the high level of openness and sincerity in Rybnikova-Shilova’s diary, because the method, as he envisaged it, depended precisely on the mother describing the child “in the subjective conditions of [its] interrelation with her.”¹²⁰ The truth of the recorded observations was here created not through “mechanical objectivity,” but rather through a form of phenomenological subjectivity: “facts are not grouped according to certain indices, but are taken directly as they have been perceived and assimilated in the consciousness of observation.”¹²¹ For an observer from the outside—the reader of the diary—this presents

¹¹⁶Ibid., 142 (also pp. 143, 146).

¹¹⁷Confessional *samokritika* had not, of course, acquired the enormous political implications of the Stalinist 1930s, on which, see, for example, Igal Halfin, *Stalinist Confessions: Messianism and Terror at the Leningrad Communist University* (Pittsburgh, 2009).

¹¹⁸Dernova-Iarmolenko, “Kak pisat’ dnevniki,” 43–44. In 1915, P. F. Kapterev also praised E. I. Konradi’s *Ispoved’ materi* (1876) in similar terms (Kapterev, *Istoriia russkoi pedagogii*, 521). We have also seen related elements of self-abnegation in Krichevskaiia’s *Moia Marusia*. In fact, in Krichevskaiia’s own assessment of Rybnikova-Shilova’s diary she construes it as an “artless, sincere, deep and serious confession of a *mat’-vospitatel’nitsa*” (Krichevskaiia “O dnevnike Koli Shilova: Otsenka dnevnika so storony pedagogicheskoi,” in Rybnikova-Shilova, *Moi dnevnik*, 167). In subsequent diaries, *samokritika* is also praised as something of an obligatory distinction. See, for example, A. D. Pavlova, *Dnevnik materi: Zapiski o razvitiu rebenka ot rozhdeniia do 6½ let* (Moscow, 1924); and Nadezhda Sibileva, *Put’ materi v vospitanii rebenka (oshchup’iu)* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1930).

¹¹⁹Rybnikova-Shilova, *Moi dnevnik*, 143.

¹²⁰Ibid., 163.

¹²¹Ibid. Daston and Galison locate in the middle of the nineteenth century a crucial shift in science from the principle of truth-to-nature to what they call “mechanical objectivity,” rooted in statistical techniques and experimental protocols (*Objectivity*, 256–57).

an authentic record of reality, incorporating the internal sense of “the experience of the actual participants of the interactions.” This is what makes Rybnikova-Shilova’s diary an “authentic document.”¹²² Indeed, truthfulness is here sought in authenticity and artlessness (*bezkhitrostnost'*, *beziskusstvennost'*), rather than in accuracy, rigor, systematicity, or objectivity.¹²³ And this radically transforms the expert’s key problem of delegating observation to a mother as a fundamentally unreliable, subjective observer. The mother is no longer viewed as a mere data provider, but as a vital condition of the “factuality” of the data generated by her.¹²⁴

Crucial to Oen’s positive reinterpretation of the subjectivism of a mother’s diary was the fundamental ambiguity of the position of the parent (specifically the mother) on the boundaries of science. The ambiguity of maternal subjectivism here lies in the fact that this subjectivity is presented simultaneously as that of an observer (the mother as someone constantly watching both her child and herself), and that of an instrument of observation (the mother as someone who experiences her child growing and developing, as well as records these experiences in the diary), and, finally, that of the one observed (both as an inextricable part of the mother-child dyad and as a self-confessing diarist).

PARENT DIARIES IN SOVIET PEDOLOGY AND BEYOND

The above subjectivist, phenomenological framing of Rybnikova-Shilova’s diary remained, however, something of an anomaly. Objectivist, scientist requirements, which sought to bring the observational diary method into line with experimental and survey ones, continued to be applied in the evaluation of practically all mothers’ diaries published in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In consequence, diaries of child development and behavior produced by “ordinary” mothers were marginalized even further in the context of early-Soviet child science (pedology), although they continued to be promoted as experiential or broadly sociocultural documents of potential educational use mostly to young, inexperienced mothers.

Standardized diary-keeping by professional staff—namely *vospitatel'nitsy* working in state-run nurseries, kindergartens, and children’s homes—expanded considerably in the late 1920s.¹²⁵ While “teeming with life,” as well as being identified with the enterprise of Soviet pedology, such documents worked, in effect, as forms of professional-administrative “accounting” of the work carried out at these institutions; and as such, they were eventually

¹²²Ibid., 163–64.

¹²³See Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (London, 2003), 104.

¹²⁴Rybnikova-Shilova, *Moi dnevniki*, 158.

¹²⁵For an earlier example see Revveka Efraimovna Orlova, *Iz dnevnika detskogo sada* (Moscow, 1918). Kirschenbaum discusses the extensive documenting of child behavior in Saratov kindergartens in the late 1920s (*Small Comrades*, 114). The Commissariat of Health’s State Scientific Institute for Maternal and Infant Protection also standardized diaries on children to be carried out by *sestry-vospitatel'nitsy* working in preschool childcare institutions under its jurisdiction (A. S. Durnovo, ed., *Osnovy pedologii i pedagogiki mladenchestva* [Moscow, 1926], 249–53). As already discussed, there has always been continuity and overlap between “mothers’ diaries” and related diaries kept by professionals working in early child care. Often the mother, the *vospitatel'nitsa*, and even the child psychologist would be the same person (for example, A. S. Simonovich, A. D. Pavlova, and V. F. Shmidt).

perceived as distracting staff from regular duties, which is why they were scaled down considerably in the 1930s.¹²⁶

Mothers' diaries themselves remained a minor genre, typical of a few individual women, typically from the educated classes ("the intelligentsia") and especially those involved professionally in child care and education. They therefore seemed of little use in the late-1920s–early-1930s' push toward a pedology of the child of the Soviet masses.¹²⁷ For these reasons, diaries of early child development did not feature prominently in the heated ideological and methodological debates over Soviet pedology at the height of the latter's institutionalization by the Bolsheviks in the late 1920s or indeed its demise under Stalin in the 1930s.¹²⁸ While the use of mass methods, such as mental tests and surveys, ended up being prime targets in the Communist party's condemnation of pedology as a "pseudo-science" in 1936, diaries of early child development, thanks to their low profile, continued to be produced after this date, albeit without association with discredited pedology.¹²⁹

Rybnikov's mobilization of parent diary-keeping was most active at the TsPI in the 1920s, but he continued to build an archive of diaries at what was now the State Institute of Psychology in Moscow even after pedology's demise. By 1946 the manuscript collection numbered around fifty diaries, although the majority dates back to the late 1910s–early 1920s.¹³⁰ Only a few diaries from this collection were actually published, most of them before 1936. These were, for instance, A. D. Pavlova's *Diary of a Mother* (1924), prefaced by Rybnikov, E. I. Stanchinskaia's *Diary of a Mother* (1924), with a forward by Kornilov, and Nadezhda Sibileva's *A Mother's Path* (1930), edited by Rybnikov.¹³¹ Rybnikov himself made use of at least ten different diaries for his *Dictionary of the Russian Child* (1926), and he continued to promote the collecting of parent diaries into the 1940s, despite the fact that the archive did not appear to be a much-used resource, and that his own and Kornilov's editorial comments on published mothers' diaries invariably stated that their scientific value was limited.¹³²

¹²⁶Kirschenbaum refers especially to the methodologies developed by S. S. Molozhaviy (Small Comrades, 114). See Molozhaviy, *Uchet sredy i raboty detuchrezhdeniia: Programma izuchenii rebenka i detskogo kollektiva v ee prakticheskom primenenii* (Moscow, 1925).

¹²⁷Alexandre Etkind, "L'essor et l'échec du mouvement paidologique: De la psychanalyse au 'nouvel homme de masse,'" *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique* 23 (1992): 387–418.

¹²⁸On pedology in this era see, for example, Aleksandr Etkind, *Eros nevozmozhnogo: Istoriia psikhonanaliza v Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1993), 311–41; and Kurek, *Istoriia likvidatsii pedagogii i psikhotehniki*.

¹²⁹See, for example, Kurek, *Istoriia likvidatsii pedagogii i psikhotehniki*; E. Thomas Ewing, "Restoring Teachers to Their Rights: Soviet Education and the 1936 Denunciation of Pedology," *History of Education Quarterly* 41 (2001): 471–93; A. V. Petrovskii, "Zapret na kompleksnoe issledovanie detstva," in *Repressirovannaia nauka* (Leningrad, 1991), 126–35; and P. Ia. Shvartsman and I. V. Kuznetsova, "Pedologiya," in *Repressirovannaia nauka*, vyp. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1994), 121–39.

¹³⁰Rybnikov, "Detskie dnevniki," II. 23–26.

¹³¹See Pavlova, *Dnevnik materi*. E. I. Stanchinskaia's *Dnevnik materi: Istoriia razvitiia sovremennogo rebenka do 7-mi let* (Moscow, 1924); and Sibileva, *Put' materi*.

¹³²Rybnikov, "Detskie dnevniki," II. 9–27. He cites only the work of N. A. Mechinskaia, who used the archive for her study on cognitive development published in *Uchenye zapiski Gosudarstvennogo nauchno issledovatel'skogo In-ta psikhologii*, 1941, vol. 2 ("Detskie dnevniki," I. 180b.). Regarding Sibileva's diary, he commented that "the pedologist has to go through these notes very thoroughly in order to separate factual data on the child's development from [the mother's] subjective experiences and evaluations. This, of course, makes the use of these notes for scientific pedagogical purposes extremely difficult" (See Sibileva, *Put' materi*, 6).

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the “wife-activist” (*obshchestvennitsa*) movement, which involved the mobilization of educated women to teach worker families about child care, health, and hygiene, did prompt the idea of the diary of a *mat'-obshchestvennitsa*, although the children whose *vospitanie* such a figure was meant to be in charge of went beyond her immediate family.¹³³ This built on efforts from the early 1930s to create a band of “parent-activists” in local schools and entrust them with some aspects of propaganda and enlightenment work in parenting.¹³⁴ The latter included not only organizing events designed to spread the desired principles of upbringing or hygiene but also performing some elements of child study, for example, inspecting fellow parents’ living conditions and offering advice, especially when children were performing badly in school.

The mothers’ diaries that played a more serious role in the *scientific* study of child development in the Soviet era were those kept by mothers who were also positioning themselves as academic psychologists. Two key diaries of this sort were by Vera Fedorovna Shmidt, kept in 1920–26 in the context of the early-Soviet psychoanalytic movement, and Nadezhda Nikolaevna Ladygina-Kots, kept in 1925–29 and used in her studies in evolutionary psychology, juxtaposing observations of her son with those of a young chimpanzee.¹³⁵ Later diaries of this kind include those by Natal’ia Aleksandrovna Menchinskaia, an educational psychologist who kept her diary during 1937–45; and Valeriia Sergeevna Mukhina, a child psychologist and former student of Ladygina-Kots, who kept her diary during 1961–68.¹³⁶ These diaries, contrary to the explicitly amateur efforts discussed above, were intended to be read in a scientific context. They arguably entailed a new and rather distinctive enactment of *materinstvo*—the motherhood of a mother-scientist, in which a new set of ambiguous relationships between mother, child, and science itself comes to the fore.

However, this discourse was by no means purely “scientific,” either. For example, although Vera Shmidt engaged fully her psychoanalytic approach in the course of compiling the diary of her son Volik, the very opening of this diary testifies to her even greater concerns with problems of *vospitanie*. This is expressed as the anxiety of an *intelligent* over how one should cultivate one’s offspring; it is a form of self-reflection over the means and meanings of *vospitanie* as form of this social group’s sociocultural reproduction.¹³⁷

¹³³David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914–1939* (Ithaca, 2011), 94; M. N. Petrova, “Iz dnevnika materi-obshchestvennitsy: opyt zaniatii s otstaiushchimi shkol'nikami,” *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, 1941, no. 1:58–64.

¹³⁴A. Gelina, T. Dunaeva, and A. Zhilina, *Pedologo-pedagogicheskaia propaganda v politekhnicheskoi shkole: Rabota s roditeliami i naseleniem* (Leningrad, 1933).

¹³⁵See Vera Shmidt, *Dnevnik Materi: Pervyi god zhizni* (Izhevsk, 2009); and idem, *Dnevnik Materi: Vtoroi i tretii gody zhizni* (Izhevsk, 2009). See also the unpublished manuscript, part of the personal papers of Vladimir Ottich Shmidt, kept by Professor Aleksei Sergeevich Obukhov at the Moscow State Pedagogical University. Also see N. N. Ladygina-Kots, *Diia shipanze i diia cheloveka* (Moscow, 1935).

¹³⁶N. A. Mechinskaia, *Dnevnik o razviti rebenka (ot rozhdeniia do 8 let)* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1948); idem, *Razvitie psikhiki rebenka: Dnevnik materi* (Moscow, 1957); V. S. Mukhina, *Bliznetsy* (Moscow, 1997); idem, *Tainstvo detstva*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg, 2000). See also V. S. Mukhina and A. A. Khvostov, eds., *Vozrastnaia psikhologiya: Detstvo, otrochestvo, iunost': Khrestomatiia* (Moscow, 2003), 106–74.

¹³⁷On what follows see Shmidt, *Dnevnik Materi: Pervyi god zhizni*, 3–4.

CONCLUSION

Always more than a mere source, diaries and diary-writing have been an abundantly studied historical and cultural phenomenon, especially on account of the insights that they offer on the formation of modern subjectivities. Parent diaries, however, are a peculiar case of diary-writing: not only do they entail a distinct object of observation and reflection (the developing child), but they are also shaped by the observer-diarist adopting certain quite specific, socially and culturally determined parental roles. It is precisely for this reason that a carefully contextualized analysis of the discourse and production of parent diaries as a distinct genre offers important insights into the social groups that produced them, as well as the wider historical significance of these practices.

In this article I situated the proliferation of Russian parent diaries at the turn of the twentieth century in the context of the expansion of the late tsarist Russia's professional middle-class intelligentsia. Though it remained small relative to the size of the population as a whole, as well as constrained in its professional and civic autonomy by the autocratic state, this relatively heterogeneous social stratum experienced significant growth, specialization, and rise in status following the Great Reforms. By the beginning of the twentieth century it had emerged as a key player in Russia's accelerated modernization. As the embodiment of the empire's nascent civil society it was the articulator of both the ideals and the anxieties surrounding Russia's turbulent social transformations. Education and science were, arguably, *the* pillars of this group's self-identity, the foundation upon which it had emerged as a distinct social stratum, its major form of "capital." In this context, the notion of *vospitanie*, entailing the concept of nurturing and the inculcation of culture, traditionally associated with early family upbringing, acquired considerable significance in the ideology of the professional intelligentsia, specifically in the context of its own reproduction as a class, as well as the reproduction of its value system in Russian society more generally.

Russian parent diaries thrived precisely at the complex intersection of *vospitanie* and *nauka*, the relationship between which was at this time shaped to a considerable degree by an emergent and expanding child study movement. The key spheres of origin of Russian child study, in which parent diaries were promoted in the period between the Great Reforms and the First World War, were the professionalization of early child care and preschool pedagogy; the medicalization of child care and the proliferation of prophylactic and hygiene propaganda; and the rise of modern forms of scientific psychology, which entailed the expansion of its methodological tool-kit as well as its range of research objects, among which children took a particularly prominent place.

The parents who engaged most actively in diary-keeping commonly identified this practice within certain "quasi-professional" interests and aspirations—in the realms of both education and psychology—which went beyond their role as "mere" parents of a particular child. Furthermore, the specific positioning of individual parents on the boundaries of expertise in child study varied, depending on which specific professional identities the parent in question identified with and enacted, something usually linked to whether they were male or female.

The experts who were the most interested in parent diaries of child development were groups of psychologists who considered turning them into a viable and legitimate method of psychological study. Crucial to this project was the wish to make parental diary-keeping “objective” through standardizing observations and diary notations, thus eliminating the “unscientific” interference of parental subjectivity (as a rule associated with femininity). However, the diary of child development, *as kept by parents*, remained at all times teetering precariously on the outer edges of scientific legitimacy. What was at stake in the psychologists’ project was less the instrumentalization of actual parental observations (which never seemed to be properly allowed into the domain of scientific “objectivity”), and more the deployment of the (inherently subjective) “parent” as a foil against which the proper “objectivity” of the psychological method of prolonged diary-recorded observations of a developing child would be articulated and legitimized—in competition with, as well as in emulation of, other methods, especially experimental ones, which dominated psychology’s self-definition as a science at this time.

Although a certain degree of standardization and professionalization of child-observation and diary-keeping was achieved in the regulation of the work of staff employed in institutions for early child care and education in the Soviet 1920s, actual parent diaries continued to be sidelined as a minor, dilettante genre. More radical attempts to redefine the epistemological premises of the “mother’s diary” as a legitimate psychological method by departing from the imperative of scientist objectivity and by redefining the methodological significance of maternal subjectivity remained isolated and without influence. Otherwise, parent diaries were recognized as scientifically legitimate only in cases where the parent-diarist was a qualified, practicing psychologist engaging in diary-writing primarily as a researcher rather than a parent.

This article has explored, above all else, the ambiguities embedded in the Russian experts’ fostering of parental diary-keeping and their rhetorical framing of this practice, as well as the diversity of the Russian parents’ positioning and self-identification in this context. The role that parent diaries played in the rise and fall of Russian child study between the 1880s and the 1930s might not have been as high-profile or as controversial as that of, say, mental tests. However, parent diaries of child development were a crucial “boundary practice” and “problem method” in the study of early childhood and as such vital to the negotiations of the boundaries of “science” in this particular domain of the Russian child study movement.